



The Buckeye Airlifter



The 179th Airlift Wing, Ohio Air National Guard, Mansfield, OH

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Medical Squadron treats 5,000 Belizeans during annual deployment

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Saving the world is something most people think only superheroes do. If that's true then there are 47 new superheroes to add to the list.

In late July, members of the 179th Airlift Wing Medical Squadron deployed to Independence, Belize, to participate in a humanitarian mission called MEDRETE.

Belize is one of seven countries that make up Central America. It is bordered by Mexico to the north and Guatemala to the south and west. The Caribbean Sea lines Belize's east coast making it a beautiful and tropical country for many visitors.

While Belize may be best known for its preserved barrier reefs and great water sports, the majority of the country's 250,000 people live in low economic conditions making it tough to obtain proper medical care.

While the MEDRETE exercises

sending Guard units to impoverished nations have been going on for years, this is the first time a team of medical professionals from the 179th AW deployed in support of these efforts. The 179th didn't just deploy in the normal fashion either, they made their humanitarian mission a benchmark for other units to follow.

"Most units deploy with \$30,000 in medications and supplies," said Senior Master Sgt. George Velez, MEDRETE team chief. "We brought \$300,000 worth of supplies and medications. We want to be the premier expeditionary medical squadron in the Air National Guard."

The impressive fact is the 179th only received \$33,000 from 12th Air Force, the command and control headquarters for all medical squadron readiness exercises, the rest of the supplies and medications were raised through donations and the work of Tech. Sgt. Tom Koehler.

Koehler worked full-time for three months preparing for the deployment and working with local Mansfield companies, churches and national



Dentists and dental technicians extracted more than 1,100 teeth during the training.

pharmaceutical companies and non-profit organizations to raise the additional materials.

"I called Heart to Heart and Interchurch Group, along with Med Central Health Systems, Riverside Hospital, Benco Dental and Toytime to donate items," Koehler said. "I could have gotten more, but I just wasn't sure what to bring."

Based on the after action reports of units who had participated in the MEDRETE exercise, members of the 179th were able, for the most part, to determine what type of equipment and medications to bring. More than 8,000 eyeglasses were donated as part of



Members of the 179th MDS treated more than 300 children a day while in the village of Independence, Belize, Central America..

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